Declassified and Approved For Release 2013/02/20 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000605070015-1

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WASHINGTON POST
20 November 1986

70 Contras Said to Be Training in U.S.

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A contingent of about 70 Nicaraguan rebels has begun receiving U.S.-sponsored military training at an undisclosed location in the United States—the first major sign that direct U.S. support of the contras has resumed, administration sources said yesterday.

The sources and rebel officials declined to specify where the training is taking place, but one administration official said the location could be a U.S. military reservation or "sites that look similar to military sites but belong to the CIA."

The Reagan administration has assigned the Central Intelligence Agency to manage day-to-day operations of the recently approved $100 million aid program to the rebels.

While the military is expected to assist the CIA in training the contras, officials declined to say yesterday who is conducting the program now under way.

The trainers could be U.S. military officials, outside contractors or CIA operatives, sources said.

Adolfo Calero, the head of the contras' largest guerrilla force estimated at 11,000 fighters, said yesterday that the training, which began two weeks ago, will last six weeks, and that the process will be repeated for additional contra groups. The training sites will change, U.S. sources said.

Calero said most of the trainees are officers and they will be instructed in "the works—the total aspects of troop direction."

U.S. officials have said the administration had sought to have the training take place in Central America, but Costa Rica, El Salvador and Honduras refused. The three countries did not want to risk retaliation from Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government, officials said.

Despite the start-up of U.S.-sponsored training for the first time in two years, Calero and other contra leaders expressed concern yesterday that they have not yet begun to receive weapons, equipment and other military supplies—nearly a month after President Reagan signed an order formally opening the flow of aid.

A State Department official said yesterday that "our understanding is that things are going smoothly." The official said that the department, which has overall responsibility for coordinating the contra program, will look into the reports of delays.

Calero said that nonlethal aid, including food and medicine, had already reached contra forces in Central America, but "the lethal part of it has been slow in coming."

"We do hope things can be speeded up," said Calero, who is here for meetings with U.S. officials.

Leonardo Somarriba, secretary general of the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO), the main contra alliance that includes Calero's group, said in a telephone interview from Miami that "the flow is not as it should be, but it should be getting there very soon."

Mario Calero, brother of Adolfo Calero and the chief contra procurement officer involved in the distribution of $27 million in nonlethal U.S. aid last year, said too much "pussyfooting" in Washington was causing the delays.

The delay in the contras' receipt of military supplies comes at a time when U.S. and Nicaraguan government officials have reported that Sandinista military forces have stepped up attacks and their presence across Nicaragua's northern border inside Honduras near rebel camps.

Nicaraguan sources said last week that the repeated Sandinista military presence inside Honduras is aimed at preventing large-scale contra infiltration into Nicaragua now that U.S. aid has been resumed.

U.S. military support and training of the contras had been prohibited over the last two years until Congress formally approved a new contra aid program last month.

Under the new program, $70 million can be used for military training and supplies, $27 million for food, medical supplies and other nonlethal items, and $3 million for monitoring human rights conditions.

One contra official said yesterday that U.S. government planes are expected to fly the supplies to Central America, and rebel forces will be responsible for ferrying them inside Nicaragua.

Calero said he is seeking a broad range of military hardware that ranges from planes and boats to mules. He said the rebels especially need surface-to-air missiles to thwart Soviet-built helicopters that the Sandinistas have used effectively against them.

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